Emancipatory Pedagogy in Practice:
Aims, Principles and Curriculum Orientation

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Abstract

This study was conducted to develop a practical framework for applying the theory of emancipatory or liberatory pedagogy in educational policy and practice. For this purpose, the relevant literature was reviewed and a practical framework developed to introduce the potential contribution of emancipatory pedagogy for educational practice. According to the review of the related literature, emancipatory pedagogy is an innovative approach to education that theoretically is represented in the works of Paulo Freire, Ira Shore, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren and there are some valid evidences endorsing its practicable potentiality. Emancipatory pedagogy is founded on the notion that education should play a fundamental role in creating a just and democratic society. The main educational aims of this approach are manifestation of humanization, critical conscientization, and a problem-posing education system. Emancipatory pedagogy accordingly seeks to invite both students and teachers to critically analyze the political and social issues as well as the consequences of social inequity. This requires a negotiated curriculum based on true dialogue that value social interaction, collaboration, authentic democracy, and self-actualization. It is concluded that, an active international effort should be made to introduce and diffuse the promising messages of emancipatory perspective and its fundamental role *in making positive social and political reforms*.

Keywords: Emancipatory Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy, Educational Practice.

INTRODUCTION

The role of education in reconstructing society constantly has been focused by great thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, Augustine, Marx, Mann, Parker, and Dewey (see McNeel, 2008). Most notably, Dewey's ideas in the twentieth century had a strong influence on the emergence of critical theory in education. Progressivism, which was most forcefully expressed in Dewey's writings and the large group of his followers, has had two related, but distinguishable streams. The first stream represented in the works of Harold Rugg and Ann Schumacher which focused on the emotional life of child. The other stream mostly was represented in the works of Georg Counts who insisted that education should play a fundamental role *in changing the social order and making positive social and political reforms.* Some of the manifestations of Rugg and Schumacher's orientation to education find expressions in the present-day work of some curricular reconceptualists, particularly Grumet and Painar, while Counts's legacy appears in the writing of critical theorists such as Apple and Giroux (Eisner, 1994). According to Gutek (2004), "*Critical theorists value the Pragmatist contention that our conceptions of social reality are constructions arising from the* relationships we have with other individuals in a shared environment"(p. 316). Critical theorists however, take an additional step and argue that our society, including the educational system, is brimming with oppressions and injustices. Critical theorists' educational agenda therefore should include not only helping students acquire knowledge, but also making them aware of power and politics (Moss & Lee, 2010).

The influences of critical theorists in the Frankfort School are also undeniable on the introduction of critical theory to education. It is feasible to say that this view is the outcome of the challenges about the thoughts of Hegel, Marx, and Freud among the critical theorist such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse who provided the theoretical insights into developing a critical theory to education (Giroux, 2004). Both critical theory and critical pedagogy are concerned with investigating institutional and societal practices which tend to resist the imposition of dominant social norms and structures. Distinct from critical theory, critical pedagogy however is primarily an educational response to oppressive power relations and inequalities existing in educational institutions **(Keesing-Styles,** 2003).

The most famous intellectual educator among the critical educators is the Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire, who many current critical educators such as Giroux and McLaren have been inspired and influenced by his ideas. Although Freire seldom used the term critical pedagogy in its specific sense (Keesing-Styles, 2003), what we now call "critical pedagogy," "liberatory pedagogy," or "emancipatory pedagogy" was heavily influenced by the works of this great edu-

cational thinker (McLaren & Giroux, 1994; McLaren, 2000). He is commonly regarded as "the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy" (McLaren, 2000a; Breunig, 2009).

Over the past decades, a variety of new approaches to critical pedagogy have flourished, so that there are multiple strands of critical pedagogy, such as the libertarian, the radical, and the liberationist, and all with points of difference and fusion (McLaren, 1998; Breunig, 2009). What all strands of critical pedagogy have in common is their orientation toward creating educational programs designed to enable students and teachers to understand better the conditions that affect their lives (Eisner, 1994). Taken as a whole, critical pedagogy according to Eisner (1994) is an approach to the study of school and society that has as its main function the revelation of tacit values that underlie the enterprise. The achievement of such ends typically requires careful attention to the structure of schooling, the ways in which roles are defined, and the covert messages that are taught—in short, it requires an awareness of the school's "hidden curriculum".

It should be acknowledged that critical pedagogy in general and emancipatory pedagogy in particular needs to move from text to practice (see Eisner, 1995; Gutek, 2004). There are too few writings in the critical pedagogy literature which explain clearly how to implement critical pedagogy in practice, and even some of the best writings of critical theorists offer few suggestions of strategies that teachers might use in practice (Keesing-Styles; 2003; Gore, 1993). Given this context, this study attempts to provide a practical framework for applying emancipatory pedagogy in practice. With this in mind, we review the theoretical literature emancipatory pedagogy to identify its important aspects related to practice, such as its main educational aims, principles and its orientation to curriculum development.

Educational aims

Emancipatory pedagogy is deeply rooted in the notion that education should play a role in creating a just and democratic society (Giroux, 1983). This approach to education involves a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationships in classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state (McLaren, 2000b; 1993; **Keesing-Styles,** 2003). The leaders of the movement, including Freire, Giroux, and McLaren strongly insist that education is always political, and that educators and students should become "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988) or "cultural workers" (Freire, 1998) capable of identifying and redressing the injustices, inequalities, and myths of an often oppressive world (as cited in Gruenewald, 2003).

Based on the literature review related to emancipatory pedagogy, the main educational aims of this approach are humanization, critical consci-

entization, and the establishment of a problem-posing education system. These three aims are described briefly below.

Humanization. According to Freire (1970a), the main aim of his educational philosophy is humanization. He was looking for a kind of education that had two characteristics. First, it needs to be a pedagogy that enables both students and teachers to develop a critically conscious understanding of their relationship with the world. Second and intertwined with the first, it needs to be a pedagogy that enables students and teachers to become subjects consciously aware of their context and their condition as a human being (Au, 2007). Changing the world to a humanized one for Freire (1970a) is feasible only through true dialogue which occurs under the following conditions:

Love: Dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for human beings. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.

Humility: Dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which human beings constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of human beings addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility.

Faith: Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humanity, faith in its power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in its vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all people).

Trust: Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence. It would be a contradiction in terms, if dialogue—loving, humble, and full of faith—did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world.

Hope: Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in human beings' incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search - a search which can be carried out only in communion with others.

Critical Thinking: Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking; thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and humans and admits of no dichotomy between them; thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity; thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved (Freire, 1970a).

Critical Conscientization. From an emancipatory pedagogy standpoint, one of the most important characteristic of authentic learning is the manifestation of "conscientization". Freire defines conscientization as "to *learn* to perceive *social*, *political*, and *economic contradictions* and to take

action *against the oppressive elements of reality*" (Freire, 1970a, p. 17). The phenomenon of "conscientization" occurs in a context students and their teacher "know that they know". Conscientization thus implies knowing that includes understanding and the ability to act on the learning in such a way as to affect a change (Abrahams, 2005). Freire argued that our life should make meaning through mutual dialogues at the center of educational experience. Critical conscientization through true dialogue between education communities is realized in a problem-posing education system (Freire, 1970a). He stated that authorities attempt to promulgate "silence culture" by controlling schools and other institutions so that they will be able to govern people. The masses in such a culture are viewed as "dumb" and they have been deprived from participating creatively in changing their community, and thus deprived from "being". They are still unfamiliar with the authority that imposed silence on them, even if they learn read or write in literacy courses. Breaking down this "silence culture" requires true dialogue and critical conscientization that question the underlying causes of their oppression (Freire, 1970b).

Establishing a Problem-posing Education System. As Freire (1970a) has pointed out, educators should reject a "banking" model of education, in which the teacher "owns" knowledge and "deposits" it in student's minds. In such an educational system, students are borrowers and the teacher is a lessor. The teacher deposits the knowledge in the empty mind of students and they in turn repeat it parrot-fashion. In such a system, learners are passive "receivers" who receive knowledge from the outside world. This system ignores their previous knowledge and any discovery or praxis in their learning process. Therefore, the role of teacher is to fill up the students' mind with separated information (Pippin 1998). The main characteristics of the banking model of education have listed by Freire (2003) as follows:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
- The teacher talks and the students listen.
- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it.
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.

- The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

In contrast with such an oppressive and alienating system, Freire proposes an emancipatory system which attempts to regain humanity and respects students' experiences and their culture. He suggests "problem-posing education" instead, which is a bottom-up educational model and supports dialogs between teachers and students. Freire and Antonia Faunder call this method "pedagogy of questioning" (as cited by Pippin, 1998). Whereas the banking model of education kills creativity, the problem-posing education tries constantly to discover reality. The former obstructs conscientization; the latter attempts to manifest conscientization and critical thinking (Freire, 2003). Problem-posing education depends, then, on a dialogical theory of praxis and knowledge and a revised relationship between teacher and student (Bartlet, 2005). Teachers in this model are not only teachers, but they also participate in dialogues with students and learn from students. Hence, such a system can invite students and teachers to think critically and then make them aware of their condition and the world in which they live.

Educational principles

Emancipatory pedagogy supports a radical change in the power relationships in the classroom and suggests that teachers and students need to learn from each other. This approach engages teachers and students in changing for "production of culture"(Apple 1982, Giroux, 1985). Freire (1970a) argues that education is not the transfer of knowledge; instead it is the social or individual construction of knowledge raised in the real life of students. The former is the banking model of education which can be considered a type of domesticating, and the latter is a humanizing and liberating education. Taken together, an emancipatory pedagogy is *based upon* the following set of *key principles*:

Education broadens the student's view of reality. For emancipatory pedagogy, the goal of teaching and learning is to affect a change in the way that both students and their teachers perceive the world (Abrahams, 2005).

Education is transformative. For those teaching with an emancipatory pedagogy approach, learning takes place when both teachers and students can acknowledge a change in perception. It is this change or transformation that teachers can assess (Abrahams, 2005).

Education is political. There are issues of power and control inside the classroom, inside the school building, and inside the community (Abrahams, 2005).

Education is empowering. Critical pedagogy takes the social status of education into account and considers education an empowering process that enables citizens to select and transform their world (Nevin, Smith & McNeil, 2008).

Education is based on true dialogue. From an emancipatory pedagogy perspective, learning according to Marker (2000) is based on a true dialogue between teach-

ers and students which instead of a passive confrontation with the world, takes humanistic transformation into account.

Furthermore, this approach prefers dialogue and thinking over repetition and lecturing. This means that students possess the maximum power and they are allowed to interfere in social affairs. It also means that students will face challenges which invite them to reflect on the social nature of knowledge and ultimately reach a level where they will be able to think about what they want to do (Peterson, 2003). Taken together, based on principles of social transformation, emancipatory pedagogy emphasizes on strengthening teachers' and students' knowledge of social and political realities.

Curriculum orientation

Curriculum in emancipatory pedagogy is understood as a contextualized social and political process, what is sometimes known as "hidden curriculum". The term *hidden* here is used intentionally in distinction to the *covert* or *implicit* curriculum. It consists of the messages given to children by teachers, school structure, textbooks, and other school recourses. These messages often are conveyed by teachers who themselves are unaware of their presence (Eisner, 1994). Put simply, the hidden curriculum of banking education reproduces the dominant ideological hegemony and dehumanizes individuals to become docile objects, controlled by power structure (Hammer & Kellner, 2009). The term *hidden* implies a hider or some groups that intentionally conceals. Concealment, in turn, suggests a form of subterfuge in order to achieve some gains. Hence, the hidden curriculum is often believed to serve the interests of the power elite that the school, unwittingly, is thought to serve (Eisner, 1994). Overcoming the hidden curriculum requires that students and teachers actively participate in the decision-making process of curriculum in a true dialogue context. The dialogue process is inspiring because all the participants are able to describe the complexities of power within schools, challenge the hidden curriculum and critically reflect on the legitimatization of norms and values espoused in schools (Arce, 2004). In an emancipatory pedagogy context, curriculum hence is designed and implemented through interaction and dialogue between students and teachers, what known as "the negotiated curriculum"(Paul 2002). One of the potential results of negotiated curriculum is that students assume the greatest responsibility in the class, so that power and authority is distributed among the students and the role of the teacher often varies (Keesing-Styles, 2003).

In emancipatory pedagogy contexts, curriculum should have as its focus of investigation the study of everyday, informal, and popular culture and how the historical patterns of power that inform such cultures are imbricated in the formation of individual subjectivity and identity (McLaren, 1995; Agnello & Lucey, 2008). Friere believed that the starting point for organizing the program content

of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situations that reflect the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action (Friere, 1970a). Incorporating connections to the context of the real world allows for the development of motivated young people, consistently activating the processes of critical inquiry and creative productivity that can help students to evolve beyond the inertia of their conditioned cultures (Bishop, 2010).

The role of teacher in an emancipatory pedagogy curriculum is to help students to have a contribution in transforming their world and making positive political and social reforms. Teachers should know that students' minds are not like empty containers to be filled, if they accept Friere's caution stating that "nobody knows everything and there is no one who knows nothing" (as cited in Bartlet, 2005). Teachers as transformative intellectuals must engage in a form of intellectual labor, not as technician, in order to experience education in a transformative way (Giroux, 1988). Indeed, the teacher teaches to transform and rejects the imposed values, so that in a democratic classroom, students and teachers dialogue to rediscover meaning and transform (Marker, 2000). Students who think and talk critically in the classroom according to Giroux (1992) will also become critical citizens outside the classroom.

The emancipatory pedagogy thinkers such as Freire (1970a) and Shor (1996) have shown us in practices how dialogue can provide opportunities for students to practice critical thinking. Shor (1992, 1996) proposes the participation of students in controlling learning activities and requiring them to critique educational techniques and content. Freire also supports the role of the teacher as a guide who respects students' independence and acts in accordance with learners' knowledge (Bartlet 2005). According to Freire (1985), we can learn a lot from our students and that we have to move past the painful arrogance and elitist traditionalism that claims that the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing.

Emancipatory teaching therefore requires an atmosphere which support to occur critical investigation of the assumptions that are made about daily lives and interactions (Shor, 1987).This approach emphasizes dialogue not only as a tool for teaching but also as a means to evaluate students' learning. Accordingly, assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and its main function is providing opportunities for students to critically analyze and reflect on their knowledge and their experience. In such contexts, then, self-assessment and peer assessment procedures might be more useful than other forms of assessments.

CONCLUSION

Emancipatory pedagogy came to existence after Freire's book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in the 1970s. Although Freire's initial focus targeted adult literacy projects in Brazil, his work has subsequently dealt with a wide range of social and educational issues and has become popularly adopted and critiqued. Freire's work was first influential in the late 1960s and early 1970s and then re-emerged in the mid-1980s to dominate the literature of critical pedagogy (Keesing-Styles, 2003; Pippin, 1998; Abrahams, 2005). His experiences compelled him to develop educational ideals and practices that would serve to improve the lives of impoverished peasants and to lessen their oppression (Breunig, 2009). Freire's educational philosophy moved beyond adult education and affected a broad range of social and educational issues and settings.

Ira Shor was the first scholar who applied Freire's educational philosophy in practice. Deeply affected by Freire's educational philosophy, Shor decided to take the philosophy to his class. He described emancipatory pedagogy as:

"Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse" (p.129).

In his pedagogical analysis *When Students Have Power* (1996), Shor describes how to employ emancipatory pedagogy in the classroom. His description implies that emancipatory pedagogy may sound useful and appealing, even though its implementation is so difficult.

He stated that the socio-cultural environment of the classroom has to be reshaped and student's roles should be changed from objects to critical and active participants so that they could struggle to find themselves (Shor, 1992; 1996).

Employing emancipatory pedagogy in practice, indeed, has not been limited to the efforts of Freire and Shor, but these two examples might be valid evidences representing its practicable potentiality. Freire's revolutionary theory of pedagogy has deeply influenced progressive educational practice and inspired educational activism around the world. In Latin America, approaches that draw on Freire's pedagogy are broadly known as popular education, while in the United States they are more frequently described as critical pedagogy (Bartlet, 2005). Those who draw on Freire's pedagogical theory plan and implement educational initiatives that aim—though with varying degrees of success—to create progressive social change and more egalitarian social relations (Bartlet, 2005).

In conclusion, what has been presented in this paper is that emancipatory pedagogy is an innovative approach in education which could and has been suc-

cessful in practice. This review suggests that more attention to the application of emancipatory pedagogy to educational practiceis needed and more studies should be done to redefine the aims of education and rethink the role of school curricula in emancipatory terms. Future studies should focus on continuing to develop a practical framework to design emancipatory-based curricula and instructional programs and to examine their effectiveness in real learning situations. Additionally, as Eisner (1994) points out:

"Teachers still close the classroom door and do what they know how to do and believe is best for the students they teach. In this sense, changes in the teachers' ideology may be among the important changes can be made in the field of education" (p. 83).

To that end, there may be a need for emancipatory educators to continue to broaden teachers' understandings of the nature of this approach and its potential contributions for classroom practice. It is also expected that an active international effort should be made to introduce this approach to the developing world and to help emancipatory educators and teachers in these countries towards diffusing the promising messages of emancipatory perspective throughout the world.

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